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CAMPUS

UWI TODAY

THE UNIVERSITY OF THE WEST INDIES • ST AUGUSTINE CAMPUS

SUNDAY 12 JUNE 2022

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Home Tree

Boana punctata, the polka-dot treefrog, passes the time on a broad leaf in the Hacienda Jacana forest retreat and lodge in Central Trinidad. As the name implies, treefrogs spend most of their lives living in trees and tall vegetation. Trinidad's lush forests are home to several species of these (usually) tiny amphibians, as they are to a host of plant and animal life. Sunday, June 5 was World Environment Day, the day the United Nations has established to encourage awareness and action to protect our environment. UWI St Augustine has a thriving community of scientists, agriculturalists, and nature enthusiasts dedicated to studying the natural world and finding new solutions for us to live in harmony with its colourful denizens. PHOTO: AMY DEACON



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FROM THE PRINCIPAL

The Value of Education

The message below is an excerpt of a longer statement by Professor Copeland.
For the full statement, visit <https://sta.uwi.edu/uwitoday/>.

Just last month, on May 18 to 20 to be exact, UNESCO held the World Higher Education Conference in Barcelona, Spain. This event, hosted as the world emerges from the years-long pandemic crisis, was very timely.

In its conference concept note, UNESCO points to the need for “a new vision, a reinvention of what higher education will mean in the future”. In Trinidad and Tobago and the wider Caribbean, we have been grappling for some time with questions of how to transform not only higher education, but education at all levels. The pandemic has amplified the critical nature of these efforts. This is not only through the disarray it has caused, but also because of the enormous opportunity it represents by forcing us to recognise two of the greatest enemies of national and regional development – complacency and a conformity to outdated practices. This holds true for education as it does for many other sectors in society. COVID-19 has assaulted and exposed the fragility of systems, forcing us to question their viability and, as necessary, find better ways to fulfil their purposes. It has shaken the proverbial tree.

The Government of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago recently announced its non-support of the Campus’ proposal to increase tuition fees submitted by UWI St Augustine Campus to The UWI Council. The precursor to this was at the annual meeting of the UWI Fees Committee, on which the Student Guild and Government sit to discuss fees for the upcoming year. At that meeting, the Guild raised its objection to the proposal as we anticipated, but the Government reserved its position pending Cabinet discussion. The committee mandated that discussions be held among the three parties to come up with a final recommendation to Council. The next University Council meeting will be held in late July, but with the Government having stated its position, it is our hope that Council will now be able to have a fulsome discussion on whether to retain the current 21-year-old fee structure or not prior to that; this will provide the necessary clarity to current and prospective students for the new academic year starting in September.

The Campus fully respects the government’s decision and acknowledges the concerns of stakeholders on its operations. However, there is need to provide some perspective on this issue and to bring more clarity to the issues at hand.

As was correctly stated, the institution is rather complex and, not surprisingly, so is its financial framework. To explain further, the fees in question pertain only to programmes that regional governments agree to cover 80 percent of economic costs with students contributing the remaining 20 percent. This 20 percent is what is defined as tuition; essentially then, students registered in such programmes have, since 2001, benefited from an 80 percent scholarship. These are called Campus Grant Committee (CGC) programmes. There are also programmes, primarily postgraduate programmes, for which students pay full economic cost. The Medical Sciences programmes are not CGC funded and so do not fall within the scope of this discussion.

It is my belief that whether it is to reduce the demands on Government or to ensure that we can make ends meet, the time has come for an increase in tuition fees. Further, the paradigm of fee stagnation has to be broken and fee reviews conducted and implemented on an annual basis. This is the norm on other campuses and at universities globally. In this regard, work is being done to determine what level of student investment in their own education is fair and affordable, while being necessary for the proper functioning of the university.

The proposal to increase tuition is just one of the strategies planned to address an unanticipated 10 percent reduction – approximately \$51 million – in Government subvention. However, this will cover less than half the shortfall. Other strategies mentioned in the proposal include a further reduction in expenditure by approximately \$20 million (expenditure has already been reduced by more than \$100 million over the past six years), and an increase in income from various sources by \$9 million. A key component of the latter is the launch of The UWI Global School of Medicine which is awaiting feedback on



facilitation requests from Government and which, at maximum estimated returns, would provide income equivalent to 25 percent of the Campus’ current expenditure. We have also greatly enhanced our relationships with private sector entities in a range of projects. We look forward to building mutually beneficial partnerships with them through UWI Ventures Ltd, as we begin to launch selected spinoff companies, adding to the portfolio of foreign exchange income earning companies.

Understandably, the idea of having to spend more on anything, even something as vital as education, may be somewhat disconcerting. We recognise and sympathise with these concerns, particularly those raised by the Guild of Students on the increased challenge to the most vulnerable of our citizens. However, these decisions are not being taken lightly. We are mindful of the fact that The UWI was created to serve the Caribbean, and, therefore, unlike the corporate sector, does not have the profit motive as its highest priority. However, we are also mindful of the fact that it is our sole responsibility to balance the books at the end of the year.

It is my view that the critical issue of access facilitation, particularly to the disadvantaged, must not be conflated with financial considerations. This is the responsibility of society as a whole – the public, the UWI, Government and the corporate sector – through, for example, scholarships, bursaries, grants, and educational investments. Indeed, the Guild has proposed a national campaign to encourage parents to create education investment funds. It is not a new idea for The UWI, but certainly one that should once again be weighed in the funding model discourse. The following example speaks directly to the proposal: not counting accrued interest, a family investment of TT\$250 a month over the 18-year lifetime of the average student at entry, fully covers the TT\$54,000 tuition (TT\$18,000 per year) for the internationally accredited BSc Engineering three-year degree at the St Augustine Campus. The BSc Engineering is the most expensive CGC funded programme. A similarly accredited degree in the UK can cost a non-UK resident £20,000 to £30,000 or more per year! When one considers the lifetime benefit to the graduate engineer in terms of the opportunity to work or study almost anywhere in

the world, the value of the family investment is unquestionable.

If students are expected to invest more in their education, we are expected to ensure the quality of that education. This includes proper mechanisms for evaluation, feedback and measurement of outcomes. We have been increasing our efforts in these areas and will continue to do so. Indeed, the need for greater performance measurement was cited as one of the major conclusions in the Chancellor’s Report on Governance. I believe this is crucial for both the growth of The UWI and the maintenance of its reputation.

The provision of quality internationally accredited higher educational services to the region is costly. Equipment and services have to be upgraded regularly and the teaching staff must include a highly qualified, internationally recognised cohort. However, our fees have not increased in some 21 years – that’s longer than many of our students have been alive! In fact, these fees are among the lowest in the Caribbean. The new proposal actually aligns St Augustine tuition fees with those at other campuses. At the same time, we fully acknowledge the fact that CARICOM governments have been investing less in The UWI as they face their own challenges in addressing more critical national priorities with weakened and unstable cash flows. New, competing tertiary level institutions have been established. Life, in general, becomes more expensive over time, and 21 years is quite a long time in this regard. Indeed, had fees been allowed to increase to match inflation rates, the current levels would have been almost three times what they are today.

The St Augustine Campus tuition fee proposal speaks to our economic reality. However, this is about much more than responding to a revenue shortfall. I began this article by focusing on the need for a new vision for education for this new post-COVID world. I believe that essential to this vision is a fresh recognition of the value of education to society, and our collective responsibility in its development and in ensuring our ability to thrive. Education is an investment, and we must all be investors, as well as shareholders.

Brian Copeland

PROFESSOR BRIAN COPELAND

Campus Principal

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■ CAMPUS NEWS

The UWI has approved two new campus principals among several other new appointments and reappointments of executives and senior managers at its recent University Council meeting.

Members of the regional university's highest-governing and decision-making authority gathered in late April for its annual review of the academy's business affairs, operations and financial management, and, as is customary, senior appointments.

The list of appointments and reappointments approved by the University Council expected to take effect from August 1, 2022 includes:

New appointments

- **Professor Rose-Marie Belle Antoine** as new Principal at the St Augustine Campus
- **Dr Francis Severin** as new Principal at the Open Campus
- **Professor Elizabeth Walcott-Hackshaw** as Dean of Humanities and Education at the St Augustine Campus

Reappointments

- **Professor Winston Moore** as Deputy Principal at the Cave Hill Campus
- **Ms Charlene Riley** as University Archivist
- **Mrs Andrea McNish** as University Bursar
- **Mrs Judith Nelson** as University Management Auditor
- **Dr Paulette Kerr** as Campus Librarian at the Mona Campus
- **Dr Rhonda Jaipaul-O'Garro** as University Director, Marketing and Communications
- **Mr Howard A. Pearce** as Deputy Campus Bursar at the Mona Campus
- **Professor Michael Taylor** as Dean of Science and Technology at the Mona Campus
- **Professor Edwin Ekwue** as Dean of Engineering at the St Augustine Campus

New Campus Principal among senior appointments approved at University Council



Professor Rose-Marie Belle Antoine



Prof Edwin Ekwue



Prof Elizabeth Walcott-Hackshaw

During the public, open session of the meeting, broadcast live via UWItv, UWI Chancellor Robert Bermudez delivered remarks as Council Chairman. Vice-Chancellor Professor Sir Hilary Beckles followed with a detailed account of The UWI's operations in the 2020-2021 academic year, including highlights of key achievements for the period, and projections for The UWI's 2022-2027 strategic cycle delivered in a presentation entitled "A Global Disruptor".

■ Read the full story on the **University Council Meeting** on page seven of this issue.

FREE DENTAL CARE FOR CHILDREN with special needs UWI clinic partners with NGO Community Chest Limited

Children with special needs in Trinidad and Tobago can now be treated for free at The UWI Special Needs Dental Clinic. The treatment centre, based at the School of Dentistry in UWI St Augustine's Faculty of Medical Sciences (FMS), recently received a generous donation of \$90,000 from non-governmental organisation Community Chest Limited (CCL).

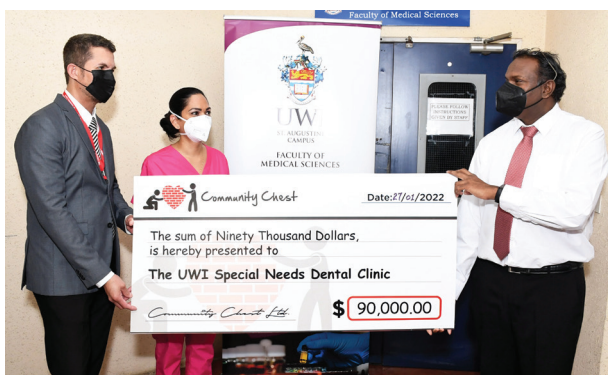
"This purposeful collaboration," said Dr Ramaa Balkaran, Lecturer in Special Needs Dentistry at the FMS, "would improve the quality of life of this population through dental care."

Special needs dentistry modifies treatment by promoting preventative dentistry and changes in routine dental care adapted to the specific needs of patients. Dr Balkaran said she hoped the initiative "would be sustainable and could also be extended to the adult population through future partnerships with the CCL and other NGOs".

A representative of CCL explained that the NGO's board recognised that there was a need for dental care for children with special needs. It was then that they discovered there was an existing specialised dental clinic that was able to provide treatment. Poor oral health is linked to other general health issues, and people with special needs often have both oral and systemic diseases. Dental treatment can be costly and, although The UWI Dental School offers highly subsidised prices, the service may still not be affordable to those who access government grants.



From left, Coordinator of The UWI Special Needs Dental Clinic Dr Ramaa L Balkaran with Community Chest directors Ms Ceila Orosco and Mr Louis Ramdhanie, UWI School of Dentistry Director Dr William Smith; Associate Dean of the Faculty of Medical Sciences (FMS) – Public Relations Ms Marsha Ivey; dental surgery assistant at the School of Dentistry Ms Francisca Phillip; and Deputy Dean of the FMS Professor Bidyadhar Sa.



From left, Dr Smith and Dr Balkaran accept the donation of \$90,000 from Mr Ramdhanie of Community Chest Limited.

Director of the School of Dentistry Dr William Smith hopes that The UWI Special Needs Dental Clinic can create additional partnerships with various NGOs to promote oral health in the special needs population.

"Such collaborative initiatives would increase access to a conscious sedation service at UWI/NCRHA clinic, provide general anaesthesia in a timely manner, and have restorative and urgent treatment completed at no, or reduced, costs through private/corporate UWI partnerships," said Dr Smith.

He added that "another goal is the provision of a dental mobile unit accessible to patients with special needs that have mobility issues or who live in rural communities".

Parents of children (under the age of 18) with special needs can book the appointments at the dental clinic. The clinical days are currently on Tuesday and Thursday mornings, as well as all day on Friday.

For further information, contact The UWI Dental School, Special Needs Dental Clinic at 645-3232, extension 4038; 645-7816; or 645-4352.

■ CAMPUS NEWS

With COVID-19 cases on the rise again, pharmacists are one of the frontline professionals most accessible during the pandemic. They work tirelessly alongside other healthcare professionals to meet the medication needs of all patients. A team of researchers from UWI St Augustine, together with a pharmacist from the Eric Williams Medical Science Complex, has conducted an online survey to explore the role, awareness and experiences of pharmacists during this very challenging time for their profession.

The survey's results showed that pharmacists reported that they suffered from anxiety (46.6 percent) and stress (65.8 percent) because of shortages in the supply of medications, increased demands from patients and physicians, having to wear a mask all the time, being overworked, and being mostly unappreciated for their work. The majority (86.3 percent) felt underappreciated for their efforts during the pandemic in the health community and suffered from depression, frustration, mental health disorders and lack of economic support. Reports from around the world have also indicated that pharmacists suffer from burnout due to overtime, increased workload, reduced staffing levels, and many changes in work schedules.

The research team consists of Ms Stephanie Mohammed (Department of Pre-Clinical Sciences), Professor Andanappa Gadad (Professor of Pharmaceutical Chemistry at the School of Pharmacy), and Dr Venkatesan Sundaram (Senior Lecturer in Veterinary Anatomy at the School of Veterinary Medicine), all from UWI's Faculty of Medical Sciences, as well as Mr Ryan Mohammed, pharmacist.

"Overall, pharmacists are on the front lines of the fight against the COVID-19 pandemic. They play a vital role in disease prevention and infection control, adequate storage and supply of medications, patient care, and physician support," explained Mr Mohammed. "Now that vaccines are being distributed, they are in the perfect position to update on vaccinations and reach out to those who are uninformed, helping to improve vaccination rates."

Ethical approval for the study was waived and, during August 2020 and March 2021, responses were received from pharmacists who had experience in the public (53.4 percent) and private (27.4 percent) sectors. Most of the respondents were between the ages of 26 and 30.

Results indicated that pharmacists were very knowledgeable about the virus, stating that they followed the news and followed the Centre for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) guidelines. It was reported that seven out of 10 patients would request information about COVID-19 regarding mask wearing, disinfection, symptoms experienced, treatment options, and how to interact with

Stressed, Overworked and Underappreciated

UWI study reveals the experiences of local pharmacists during the COVID-19 pandemic



Ms Stephanie Mohammed



Dr Venkatesan Sundaram

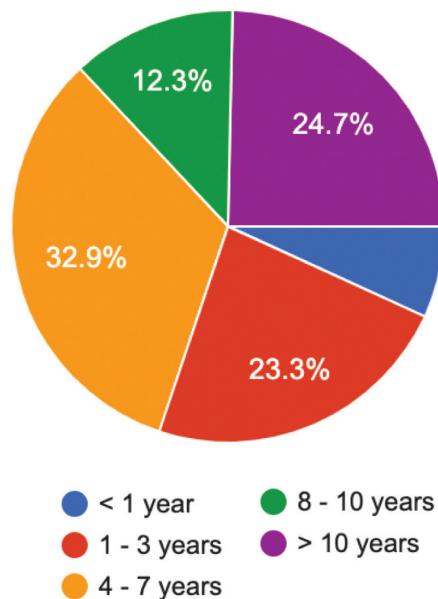


Prof Andanappa Gadad



Mr Ryan Mohammed

The length of time pharmacists are registered with the Board of Pharmacy



their children. Patients also expressed concern about their pet contracting the disease (23.3 percent), and requested information to ensure their pet's safety.

Ms Mohammed explained that pharmacists play a larger role than is well known because they are medical advisors, educators, and advocates. "These pharmacists need to be recognised for their contributions to raising awareness, dispensing medications, and adjusting workloads to ensure that all patients receive excellent care," she said.

The research team extended their sincere thanks to Dr Andrew Rahaman, President of the Pharmacy Board of Trinidad and Tobago, for his assistance during the start of the project, which helped to provide a better understanding of challenges facing pharmacists. They also expressed gratitude to the pharmacists themselves, who have been heroes in the long battle against the deadly and disruptive pandemic.

"The role of pharmacists during COVID-19 is stressful, but they adapt to help the public and other healthcare workers with disease prevention and infection control, patient care, medication dispensing, and generally educating and inspiring all. These pharmacists should be acknowledged for their contribution in fighting against the COVID-19," said Ms Mohammed.



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■ CAMPUS NEWS



Seven Scholars of the World

UWI St Augustine researchers/authors rank in top two percent of their disciplines

Seven researchers from UWI St Augustine have been ranked in the top two percent of their disciplines in the world. The ranking was revealed in the pages of the academic journal PLOS Biology. The list, written by authors from Stanford University, ranks more than 180,000 researchers within 22 scientific disciplines and 176 subfields in an objective and transparent process. The scientists are **Professor Terence Seemungal, Professor Hazi Azamathulla, Dr Sephra Rampersad, Professor Christopher Oura, Dr Mandreker Bahall, Dr Rajiv Dahiya, and the late Professor Dave Chadee**.

Commenting on the achievement, UWI St Augustine Campus Principal Professor Brian Copeland said the selections represented both the outstanding work of the individual scientists, as well as the international impact of UWI scholarship.

“When these results are considered in conjunction with the 2021 *Times Higher Education* institutional ranking of The UWI in the top 2.5 percent of the best universities globally, they further confirm the strategic leadership and stewardship of The UWI, its scholastic research output, and advocacy,” he added.

The list of authors consists of the names of the scientists within the top two percent of their main subfield discipline who have published at least five papers. The selection is based on the top 100,000 by number of citations (with and without self-citations) or a percentile rank of two percent or above. These database rankings are globally recognised, and are based on an analysis of data available in the Scopus database (a database of abstracts and citations in peer-reviewed academic journals), which is itself the standard for extracting publication data for researchers worldwide.



Prof Terence Seemungal



Dr Sephra Rampersad



Prof Dave Chadee



Prof Christopher Oura



Prof Hazi Azamathulla



Dr Mandreker Bahall



Dr Rajiv Dahiya

“We have emphasised research at the Faculty of Medical Sciences (FMS) over the past few years and I am pleased to see the success,” said **Prof Seemungal**, who is both one of the seven scientists and Dean of FMS. “The Faculty has also had a major focus on COVID-19 and I expect quite a few publications in this area over the next few years. We have several very gifted junior researchers in FMS and I expect they will uplift us further over the next few years.”

Apart from his career as an educator and researcher focused on areas like pulmonology, infectious diseases, and asthma, Prof Seemungal is a member of The UWI COVID-19 Task Force, and was regularly featured in the national media, providing his expertise and opinion as part of Trinidad and Tobago’s national strategy in combatting the pandemic.

Dr Sephra Rampersad, the lone lady scientist among The UWI seven, said, “It is extremely rewarding to have my research measured against globally valued qualifications. I am grateful for the support of my colleagues, the diligence of my students, and proud to be a product of the UWI St Augustine and the Department of Life Sciences (DLS).”

Dr Rampersad is a Senior Lecturer in Biochemistry at (DLS) in the Faculty of Science and Technology. Her research is based on the study of microbial evolution, population dynamics and genetic diversity as pathogens in plant disease and as survivalists in harsh terrestrial environments. More recently, her focus has included investigating the genomes of microbes with specialised capabilities to metabolise compounds that are important to a range of industries. Her research has a direct impact on food security, understanding ecosystem partnerships and metabolic engineering.

The other scientist on the list from Life Sciences is

the late **Prof Dave Chadee**. Known casually as “Mosquito Man”, Prof Chadee was one of the world’s foremost experts on vector-borne diseases and the *Aedes aegypti* mosquito. His work positively affected the lives of hundreds of millions of people across the world through research into mosquito-spread diseases such as dengue fever, yellow fever, malaria and the Zika virus. He helped to pioneer the development of mosquito traps, new disease surveillance systems, and new control strategies.

Christopher Oura, Professor of Veterinary Virology at the School of Veterinary Medicine within FMS, is also a member of The UWI COVID-19 Task Force. Among his research interests is veterinary virology, and his expertise was highly useful in understanding the pandemic and how diseases move from animals to humans.

Prof Oura, who leads a One-Health-based research programme concentrating on zoonotic and animal pathogens of importance within the Caribbean region, said, “Being a researcher is all about discovering things that make a real difference and improve people’s lives. This recognition means a lot to me, as it means I have done just that. Working in the Caribbean and at The University of the West Indies School of Veterinary Medicine is a privilege, and I hope to make many more important discoveries that will improve the lives of Caribbean people and Caribbean animals, in the years to come.”

Although it might be assumed that rankings of scientists in a biology publication would come from the natural and medical sciences, a UWI engineer also made the list. **Prof Hazi Azamathulla**, a lecturer in Civil and Environmental Engineering at the Faculty of Engineering, focuses on water resources engineering, physical hydraulic model studies, hydroinformatics, and climate change.

“I am very humbled by this achievement,” he said. “For over 20 years, I have been actively involved in research in water resources engineering. This research has taken me all over the world and allowed me to contribute to changing the landscape as it pertains to water resources.”

In Trinidad, Prof Azamathulla said, his research “has been looking at rivers with low discharge flows”. This can have wide reaching implications for the Caribbean, as the rivers are subjected to low flows in the dry season.

Dr Mandreker Bahall is an associate lecturer at the School of Medicine and The UWI Arthur Lok Jack Graduate School of Business who specialises in cardiology. He has very interesting and timely research specialties - patient satisfaction, expanding to the quality of life of patients with cardiac diseases with and without depression, access to public healthcare and equity, and methods for mitigating issues in the Trinidad and Tobago healthcare system related to overcrowding.

“I feel very happy,” he said of the recognition of his work. “This serves as a further motivation and reminder for me to keep expanding my research.”

Dr Bahall explained that his scholarship originated from “constant dreaming and identifying gaps, predominantly in societal issues”.

Echoing his happy sentiments was **Dr Rajiv Dahiya**, Director of The UWI School of Pharmacy within FMS and Senior Lecturer in Pharmaceutical Chemistry. Dr Dahiya, whose area of research is natural peptide synthesis, said he was “very glad” that his name is included among the top two percent of all world researchers in his discipline - Pharmaceutical Sciences. He thanked the entire campus community for supporting him.

■ UNIVERSITY COUNCIL MEETING 2022

“We believe that we have finally found a coherent solution to the financial problems of this university. We believe that we have finally reached that moment where we have a strategy, a vision,” explained Professor Sir Hilary Beckles, Vice-Chancellor of The UWI at the Annual Business Meeting of the University Council on Friday 29th April. He was addressing plans for the UWI Global Online campus, a project which will soon be brought before the council for approval.

As he delivered his annual review and deliberation of the university’s business affairs, under the theme, “The UWI: A Global Disruptor: Surging in a World of Disruption”, the Vice-Chancellor noted that The UWI had successfully completed the first part of its strategic plan titled the Reputation Revolution. “Now we’re into phase 2,” he revealed, “aggressively, assertively focusing on the Revenue Revolution which will transform the internal financial health of our institution”.

One of the most ambitious projects to this end will be the online campus which has its basis in the largest grant ever acquired by the university. Software company EON Reality has partnered with the Open Campus and is providing US\$25 million toward the project’s goals. The funding will be used to create a digital centre/lab which will be primarily used for the development of content using augmented and virtual reality tools. This will be instrumental in the UWI’s global online strategy of the future. “It is our intention to take the knowledge we have gained, the skill sets we have gained, and to take our content, our academic content, to the world for global distribution,” emphasised Sir Hilary.

Based on the proposed new funding model, partnerships like this will be vital to the UWI’s financial future. The Vice-Chancellor also discussed UWI’s arrangement with the communications company, Flow, which will assist UWITV in offering programming on research and groundbreaking work which affects the Caribbean.

He observed, “We have brought a new intensity to financial health discussions within our university.” He noted that one of the administration’s significant goals in this regard has been to reduce expenditure by 10 percent in 2020/2021.

Sir Hilary also detailed efforts to address deficit drivers, issues with government and student receivables, and post-employment benefits. He explained that by working with the regional governments, The UWI has facilitated a drop in government debt owed to the university. It is at its lowest in many years, decreasing from US\$117 million to US\$48 million.

The Vice-Chancellor also highlighted the initiative of all the UWI campuses uniting to generate significant income through entrepreneurship. Noting that “all of our campuses now have bankable products,” he declared that the goal is for these projects to generate US\$50 million annually.

He indicated that the university has benefited from reparations donations. This has resulted in the Glasgow-Caribbean Centre for Development Research, the first institution in British university history dedicated to the slavery reparations policy framework. Sir Hilary commended Bridget Freeman, whose ancestors benefited from slave enterprises, who decided to donate US\$500,000 to The UWI. The university is also in talks with Laura Trevelyan who would also like to donate funding as part of the reparations policy.

In keeping with the proposed new financial model, the Vice-Chancellor hopes that the governments will commit to providing 50 percent of the funding for The UWI while the university will acquire the rest through its own initiatives.

Sir Hilary also spent time recapping the university’s recent highlights. He called the events of the past year The UWI’s “finest moment”, observing that while facing the “existential threat” of the pandemic, the university performed admirably.

“We did not close our doors to our students,” he stated.

ONLINE AND GLOBAL

SIR HILARY LAYS OUT AMBITIOUS PLANS FOR VIRTUAL CAMPUS WITH INTERNATIONAL REACH IN ANNUAL REVIEW

BY DIXIE - ANN BELLE

“Many universities around the world closed their doors, sent home their students and staff.” “UWI’s management,” he said, had “dug deep”.

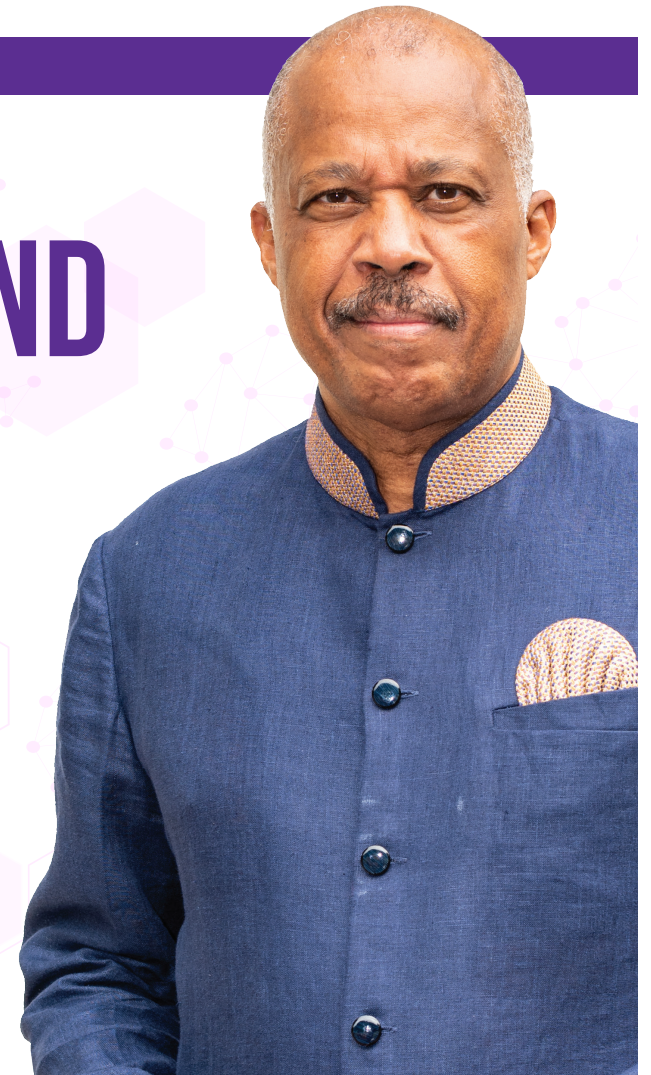
He added, “We reflected. We read the specific circumstances. We reassured our students of our fundamental commitment. We were determined that the product of this university would continue to be available to our students, and we got through with all of this.”

The Vice-Chancellor highlighted UWI’s rise to the top 1.5 percent in a global field of 30,000 universities and research institutes in the *Times Higher Education* rankings.

He outlined The UWI’s strategic choice to become an activist university, observing that this goal involves embracing the sustainable development objectives of the United Nations. “We will use these goals as the framework within which we mobilise ourselves to be activists within the Caribbean space.”

His words echoed those of Robert Bermudez, Chancellor of The University of the West Indies, who said in his opening remarks, “Whatever our differences, we stand today with a shared assignment to bring the value of The UWI to the service of our students and the efforts to resolve the many urgent problems confronting the region.”

ONE OF THE MOST AMBITIOUS PROJECTS TO THIS END WILL BE THE ONLINE CAMPUS WHICH HAS ITS BASIS IN THE LARGEST GRANT EVER ACQUIRED BY THE UNIVERSITY. SOFTWARE COMPANY EON REALITY HAS PARTNERED WITH THE OPEN CAMPUS AND IS PROVIDING US\$25 MILLION TOWARD THE PROJECT’S GOALS.



Both Chancellor Bermudez and the Vice-Chancellor touched on The UWI’s contribution to the issue of climate change. Sir Hilary elaborated on the university’s commitment to the “climate conversation”, noting that UWI experts have been dealing with the issues of rising sea levels, diminishing coral reefs, rising temperatures and more. “We were among the first whistleblowers,” he told his audience. “We were the disruptors because we have had the longest series of effective research with respect to a geographical space”.

The Vice-Chancellor also lauded the university’s public health actions like the COVID-19 Task Force, one of the first to be established in the world. He made note of The UWI’s contribution to the CDCR Diabetes Reversal Project which is working on a diagnosis and a road map for the reversal of Type 2 Diabetes, and the UWI’s joint strategy with the State University of New York (SUNY) to establish an institute for Caribbean virology research.

Noting that the university has “over-performed” in recent years, Sir Hilary declared, “We are committed and these are the reasons why we are succeeding.”



At the onset of the pandemic, there was global uncertainty and despair. The sudden plunge into lockdown left many unemployed and more without a strong social network. Safe spaces such as schools were suddenly closed and the negative impacts on youth mental health would soon emerge as a grave concern. The UWI St Augustine campus was no different and as the pandemic continues, there appears to exist a rise in suicidal ideation.

However, The UWI may simply present a microcosm of a national dilemma. Over the past three years, there has been an increase in deaths by suicide nationally. In 2019, there were 92 completed suicides, according to Ministry of Health data. In 2020 and 2021, there were 104 and 128 completed suicides respectively. When these numbers are further broken down by gender, men account for 79.8 percent of the completed suicides and the increase in 2021 was four times the 2020 number for men specifically.

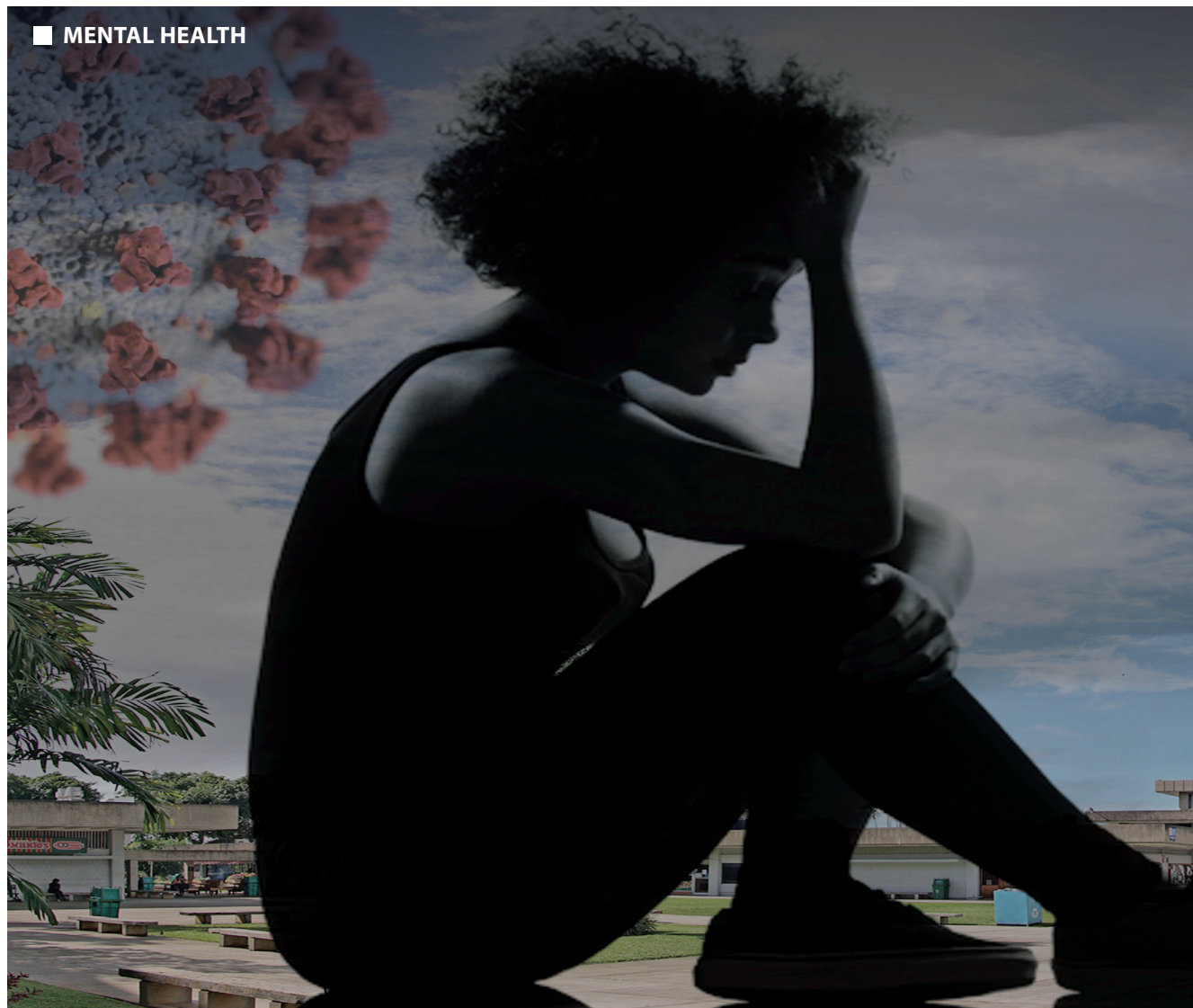
On a regional scale, Trinidad and Tobago has the third highest suicide rate in the Caribbean according to the World Health Organisation (WHO). The Counselling and Psychological Services (CAPS) Department coordinator Dr Sarah Chin Yuen Kee said that, since the pandemic, more than half of the students who access CAPS services experience suicidal ideation and The UWI unfortunately lost a member of the student body to suicide in early 2022. Moreover, the volume of students accessing CAPS counselling services not only for suicidal ideations, but a myriad of emotional and psychological concerns, has also increased.

Dr Chin Yuen Kee explained that there are numerous factors relating to these increases.

“Since the pandemic, all services have moved online and I think that has made counselling a lot more accessible. More students are using the service throughout the year. Also, because of COVID-related reasons, we’re observing an increase in severity of mental health issues,” said Chin Yuen Kee during an interview with UWI TODAY. “Normally, there may be a percentage of students who come for developmental reasons, but now the majority are presenting with depression, anxiety and deterioration in pre-existing conditions so when they are presenting, it tends to be more critical than it used to be.”

She further explained that while many news reports focus on COVID-related mental health issues among school-aged children, young adults are equally at-risk.

“Pre-COVID, the two most common presenting concerns were: mood disorders or depression-related symptoms and inter-personal issues. Since COVID, the clinicians have picked up on a pattern of difficulty at home for many students. At best it might be unsupportive, at worst it might be hostile or abusive. A lot of students would express that coming to campus was a rare break for them, an opportunity to get away from an abusive environment. So not being able to access campus caused many of our students to have new issues because they were in difficult living arrangements.”



Campus is a refuge

A particular concern to students was the loss of socialisation. “Many students might have deteriorated during that time firstly because they were living in difficult circumstance and secondly because they had lost access to their social support. Peer support has been a vital resource for a lot of our students who would otherwise be struggling and so when COVID social distancing came into play, a lot of our students were feeling very isolated and lonely,” added Chin Yuen Kee.

The Guild of Students Deputy Vice-President of Student Engagement Kaché Hanna said that in her conversations with students over the past two years, she’s heard many express feelings of immense pressure mixed with fear and sadness.

Hanna shared her own reasons for the rise in ideation among students: “The reason for the increase in mental

“Online schooling wasn’t any easier. It was a huge adjustment – a students were adjusting to navigating an online platform and more work with the idea that you’re at home so you have the time and not necessarily considering that with a student being at home, there are more than just academic challenges”

CAPS Counsellor Roma Latchman

health issues and suicidal thoughts is a multifaceted one. Some students had to endure prolonged periods of social isolation and some were quarantined in difficult homes. Many students lost loved ones and are trying to live with that grief. During the onset of the pandemic, many parents lost their jobs and some families are still going through financial hardships. The pandemic has also caused a spike in gender-based violence and some students were isolated in environments that resulted in them being victims of sexual assault. There are myriad reasons why suicidal thoughts have increased in students.”

An additional stressor was the extra academic workload and the faulty idea that online education was somehow easier to manage.

“Online schooling wasn’t any easier. It was a huge adjustment – a students were adjusting to navigating an online platform and more work with the idea that you’re at home so you have the time and not necessarily considering that with a student being at home, there are more than just academic challenges,” noted CAPS Counsellor Roma Latchman. “Students had more household responsibilities, more inter-personal conflict or they just had to adjust to a shared space with family members. Studying from home doesn’t mean you have the world of time to complete studying and that unexpected adjustment stressed students out mentally. For those who already suffered from some type of mental health disorder, it was exacerbated under duress and could’ve brought about poor coping skills,” said Latchman.

The CAPS offers many services to students including one-on-one counselling, peer counselling training, psycho-educational workshops, support groups and risk-assessments for students in crisis. The department has also hosted virtual walk-ins and meditation sessions since the beginning of the pandemic. However, the increased demand for one-on-one counselling meant that some outreach programmes suffered in recent times. “The deluge of demand for individual counselling meant that some outreach needed

Thoughts of Suicide

Pandemic pressures have driven more students to thoughts of despair. UWI St Augustine's Counselling and Psychological Services and Guild of Students intensify support for them.

BY ZAHRA GORDON



to be temporarily suspended or scaled back. We would usually have a series of psycho-educational workshops, but didn't have the resources to put those on while still managing the counselling requests," shared Chin Yuen Kee.

Due to confidentiality, it can't be said if the student who completed suicide had reached out for services, but the counsellors are nonetheless devastated by the loss. "For a small team of hardworking therapists, it is devastating when a student commits suicide because we're very aware of what someone who battles with suicidal thoughts would've gone through. And it's always sad to know that somebody has been battling with that kind of pain that would've led to a suicide. At this point, most of our students present with some type of suicidal ideation. This has become the work for all of the counsellors, so we are well aware of the agony that someone goes through. You wonder what we can do to get more people to access services," noted Chin Yuen Kee.

Latchman expressed similar sentiments. "It's quite difficult to find a silver lining when you lose someone. Part of us would know that an inevitable part of life is death, but death is such a complex and complicated element when a person has to navigate it that it's difficult.

Hanna believes that more needs to be done to destigmatise mental illness, not only on campus, but nationwide. "A person can be suicidal for various reasons such as experiencing feelings of hopelessness or undergoing traumatic stress. Thus, it is crucial to identify all of the various factors. We as a society, have a responsibility to change the narrative about suicide so that individuals don't feel ashamed to say they are experiencing suicidal thoughts. We must all aim to create a safe environment, so that our friends and family members know they can express themselves to us without fear of judgment," said Hanna.

One third-year student shared with UWI TODAY that receiving therapy from the CAPS has helped her to improve her mood and coping mechanisms. She has suffered with anxiety in the past and admitted to slipping into poor mental health management during the pandemic. She



"The reason for the increase in mental health issues and suicidal thoughts is a multifaceted one. Some students had to endure prolonged periods of social isolation and some were quarantined in difficult homes. Many students lost loved ones and are trying to live with that grief."

The Guild of Students' Deputy Vice President of Student Engagement, Kaché Hanna

believes that students shouldn't wait until they're in crisis to seek help, but use therapy as a preventative measure. "I need someone to talk to just to feel like I'm not going crazy. By being able to open up, it felt like coming up for a breath of air and that's why I recommend counselling to anyone even if you don't have a specific problem. It's just good for the interaction," she said.

Battling suicidal ideation and mental illness can foster a deep sense of hopelessness, but there are messages of hope within from both internal and external resources.

Messages of hope

Latchman's message to students is one of temporality. "A message of hope for those who might be struggling with suicide, self-harm or even just overwhelming degrees of stress is that nothing lasts forever. When we are situated in troubles and worrying times, because of that unpleasant state it often feels as if this is a lifetime of suffering, but if we step back a little bit and reflect on our lives, things aren't unchanging. Situations are always changing. Emotional states are always changing and thought processes can always change."

Hanna wants students to remember that their voices and contributions matter more than they know. "Your feelings are valid and it's normal to need help. You don't have to carry the weight of so many burdens. There are so many people that love you and appreciate you. The world needs what you have within you and your life matters. We know sometimes, it can be overwhelming but remember you don't have to do it alone."

She added that, "We will continue to shed light on this matter to ensure every student is aware of the resources available to them. Our mission is to destigmatise mental illnesses in the Caribbean and ensure no student is struggling in silence."

Zahra Gordon is a poet, freelance writer and communications lecturer.

■ CAMPUS AFFAIRS

COPIR - *measuring student satisfaction*

BY SABRINA VAILLOO

Better communication. This was one of the major issues for prospective, first-year and exiting students of The UWI St Augustine in 2021. The data was revealed in a document that shared highlights of student surveys conducted in 2021. It was produced by the Campus Office of Planning and Institutional Research (COPIR).

The document showed that even though students were moderately satisfied with their academic experience, there were areas in need of improvement in the non-academic experience. The results of the survey will assist the campus in improving service delivery to the campus community.

COPIR, according to an official statement, “collects, analyses and reports on data that supports the planning function, as well as policymaking and decision-making. It also provides information and analytical support in helping the institution to fulfil its overall mission”.

This is crucial for UWI St Augustine as the campus adapts to challenges such as decreased financial support from Caribbean host governments, greater competition from other higher education institutions, and an uncertain economic climate in the region and wider world. To improve, any institution needs accurate feedback from its customers. UWI’s customers are its students.

“The goal for us is to improve the experience and the relevance, and to create a competent human resource pool towards national development,” Mrs Reanti Singh, Head of COPIR.

The collected highlights document combines three surveys, the Prospective Student Survey, the First-Year Student Experience Survey, and the Student Exit Survey. Conducted in 2021, some of the results showed the impact of COVID-19. Most students cited the pandemic as a threat to their ability to study effectively, and wanted more support and understanding from lecturers when it came to remote education challenges, such as internet connectivity problems, and family and work commitments. Overall, students were satisfied with UWI St Augustine’s response.

Regarding prospective students, their decision to pursue higher education or their first-choice programme at The UWI did not waver much despite the difficulties brought on by the pandemic. The campus also recorded a vaccine uptake of 77 percent of prospective students and 67 percent of first-year students.

At its core, COPIR is a problem-solving engine – the on-campus cerebral cortex of the higher education system. Year-round, it is the business of a small team of people to write



“The goal for us is to improve the experience and the relevance, and to create a competent human resource pool towards national development”

Mrs Reanti Singh, Head of COPIR



and conduct student and staff surveys, collect and collate the data, and analyse it to make recommendations. The survey highlights are then presented to campus management, who in turn use the recommendations in alignment with their strategic plan.

In general, UWI’s strategic areas of focus are widening access to quality tertiary education; greater alignment of the university with academia, industry and international partnerships relevant to the region’s needs; and responding effectively to the needs of its students and staff. COPIR uses a Balanced Scorecard model to measure and improve efficiencies in learning and growth, university administration and system processes, its key stakeholders, and finances. The information it collects also helps shape policy in response to the trends that occur.

Among COPIR’s survey objectives were to learn more about student demographics and factors impacting student decisions; to learn the parameters of the student experience and what contributes to their satisfaction levels; to understand better how to attract prospective students; to learn how to improve the delivery of teaching and student support services; and to understand student concerns and communicate them for active response and decision-making.

A Trove of Data

The profile of the prospective student respondents who were surveyed in 2021 and who were accepted to an undergraduate programme at the campus stands at 25.3 percent male and 72.5 percent female. This statistic supports the continuing trend that girls outperform boys in educational achievement globally. Ninety-one per cent of this group’s respondents were Trinidad and Tobago nationals.

Of the first-year students who participated in the survey, 25.2 percent were male and 73.1 percent female. Fifty-eight percent of them ranged from ages 20 to 24, and 81 percent were locals. Among the exiting students, 27 percent were male and 71.4 percent were female, with the majority of them, 88 percent, being from Trinidad and Tobago, and 12 percent being foreign students.

In the student preferences category, surprisingly, of the prospective group, 66 percent was likely to seek employment instead of pursuing further education, but The UWI was the first choice for 83 percent of all respondents who did consider starting a degree. Forty-seven percent of students from the exiting group were actively employed either on or off campus. Ninety-one percent of exiting students expressed interest in pursuing post-graduate studies. Finally, the majority of students supported blended learning, a point that has been observed at the secondary level, too.

The majority of prospective students expressed that The UWI website and faculty booklets were helpful and informative. First-year and exiting students were moderately satisfied with the academic experience, but, as mentioned, there was somewhat less-than-average satisfaction concerning non-academic experience.

Some recommendations regarding easing financial hardship were made, namely, increased visibility of and communication about the availability of funding. Students also wanted access to a flexible tuition payment plan.

Expectedly, the pandemic created a radical shift in the learning experience and students articulated that the scheduling and delivery of the online curriculum was not conducive to the new learning environment. Included in this feedback, students expressed the desire for more frequent communication from lecturers, and from administration regarding feedback and queries related to funding and applications. To this end, students felt that a virtual student helpline, improved social media communication, and virtual office hours for lecturers would improve their overall student experience significantly.

■ To learn more current **UWI facts and statistics**, visit <https://sta.uwi.edu/copir/>



■ OUR PEOPLE



PHOTO: LEE BARNES PHOTOGRAPHY

A RISING STAR, REPRESENTING T&T ALONG THE WAY

UWI DCFA graduate Khadija Glasgow-Speers appears on the Emmy award-winning series Atlanta

BY PAUL HADDEN

Khadija Glasgow-Speers is a natural-born performer. Ask her about her earliest memories, and she will tell you that they include climbing on top of her mother's living room coffee table and performing for whoever would listen, be that her family, friends, or simply her stuffed animals and dolls.

"I think I was just born this way," she says with a smile, "and I was lucky enough to have had the support of my family and many wonderful teachers throughout the years who always encouraged me to perform."

The journey has seen the Arima-raised performer compete on the Best Village stage and work with a long list of performing arts groups which include the Deborah Nicholas Spears Arts Academy, the Mt D'or Cultural Performers, the Julia Edwards Dance Company, the Malick Folk Performing Company, the Festival Theatre Company, the Trinidad and Tobago National Theatre Company, and The UWI Arts-in-Action Unit. Now, Khadija lives in Georgia with her husband, where she continues to develop her craft and make her country proud.

Khadija, who is a Department of Festival and Creative Arts (DCFA) graduate with a Bachelor of Arts in Theatre Arts and Festival Management from The UWI St Augustine, is an accomplished actress, dancer, teacher, television and radio host and producer, and fashion designer. Her most recent accomplishment, which continues to create waves of excitement across the nation, has been her role working on an episode entitled 'Trini 2 De Bone' for the Emmy award-winning series *Atlanta*, where she worked with the multi-talented superstar Donald Glover (also known by his stage name, Childish Gambino), as a cultural consultant, co-writer, and actress on the show.

The rising star, who plays the daughter of a deceased Trinidadian nanny, was originally hired as a cultural consultant for the *Atlanta* episode where she helped to make sure that Trinidadian culture was represented in an authentic way. When asked what aspects of Trini culture Khadija wanted to feature on the episode, she responds, "All! If it were up to me, I would have hired only Trinis and had an entire pan side on the show!"

She goes on to explain that Donald Glover has a special connection to Trinidadians as he had worked alongside many during his time as a nanny in college.

"He learned so much from these Trini nannies," Khadija explains, "and what he really fell in love with was the way that these women loved people, so freely and unreservedly. He was also impressed with their work ethic and dedication to the profession, so he wanted to make sure that they were represented in an authentic way on the episode. That's where I came in."

The journey to her breakthrough role in the *Atlanta* episode has been a long one that was not without its many challenges and obstacles. Thankfully, Khadija has had no shortage of talented and encouraging mentors along the way, and says that many of the key developmental steps during her professional journey were taken at UWI.

"I think that the Department of Creative and Festival Arts has some of the best, if not the best, teachers in the field in Trinidad and Tobago, and maybe even the entire Caribbean."

On the set of *Atlanta*.

A scene from the episode, "Trini 2 d Bone".



Khadija in earlier days at home in T&T in a photo with the late Winston Bailey, Shadow.

She says that everything she learned during her time at university has, "contributed majorly" to her success and that many of her professional opportunities have "bubbled out of her time at UWI".

Even though she looks back fondly at her academic training at UWI, what has really had a lasting impact on her career has been the encouragement and support that she received from her lecturers during her undergraduate training.

"The teachers at UWI made me feel like I could do anything," she says, "and I think the personal relationship that I developed with my professors was the key to my success. I don't even know if they would remember the words of encouragement that they gave me but, to this day, when I have a tough audition to get through, it is their words that I replay in my head. Yes, the academics were fantastic, but it was the personal interactions with the teachers that really made it worth it."

Khadija has also been on the other end of the classroom, and worked as a teacher of both Theatre Arts and Social Studies in Trinidad for 13 years, encouraging many young Trinbagonians to unlock their own inner potential.

"Since I can remember, I've always liked the idea of working with young people. While we in Trinidad and Tobago may not always feel like it, I honestly believe that we have one of the best education systems in the world, and personally I feel like I've taught some of the best students ever! It makes me so proud to see my students succeed. Some of my students are now prominent not just in the arts, but other fields as well, and they continue to make me feel so happy."

Khadija views teaching as an important way for her to give back to society. "Success can never be a selfish thing; it always has to be selfless – for the more you give is the more that you will receive. It's not only important to learn, but also to teach and share what you have learned with others."

She credits her own success not just to her own efforts but to God, her mother, her siblings, her husband, and to everyone who has supported her along the way. "We can't do it by ourselves," she says, "but with the right mindset and the proper support, we can bring our dreams into fruition."

Her advice to aspiring performers in Trinidad is this: "The work starts at home. Even if we dream of going abroad, we need to remember that the work starts right where you are. Also, remember to get involved. Get involved in programmes at school and on the community level. If you don't see the group or programme that you want, then don't be afraid to create it! Remember that your commitment is to the arts itself, to your God, and to yourself. It is not an individual journey; everyone you meet on the way will contribute to your journey as you contribute to theirs. Also, remember to always keep acquiring new knowledge. I'm still learning, I'm always learning. Right now, I am taking an extremely challenging acting class that is kicking my butt. But I love a challenge. Never stop learning and learn everything that you can; no knowledge is ever wasted."

■ BOOK REVIEW



Life and times of a LABOUR PIONEER

In his latest work, Prof Brinsley Samaroo shares a history of Adrian Cola Rienzi

BY PROFESSOR BRIDGET BRERETON

The wait has been long for a properly researched biography on Adrian Cola Rienzi—for decades the only serious publication about him was a pioneering journal article by Kelvin Singh, which appeared as long ago as 1982—and he has now gotten it. Retired UWI (and UTT) professor Brinsley Samaroo has just published *Adrian Cola Rienzi: The life and times of an Indo-Caribbean progressive*. Full disclosure: I read a draft of the book and I am thanked in the author's Preface.

This book is a well-researched study. Samaroo has mined several primary sources: T&T newspapers and periodicals from the 1920s to 1940s; the Colonial Office files in the UK National Archives; the British trade union archives held at the University of Warwick; the T&T Hansard for debates in the Legislative Council; the San Fernando Borough Council Minutes; and more. Perhaps most important, he had access to the collection of papers, books and pamphlets amassed by Rienzi and held by his family. Though this is an academic study with the usual citations and references, Samaroo's style is accessible and engaging, and the book is very readable.

It must be said that this is not a conventional biography which normally follows its subject's life in a straightforward chronological sequence. The chronology within and between the different chapters is sometimes a little confusing, and Samaroo often digresses from Rienzi's life story to write about other, related topics—definitely “life and times”. But the digressions are interesting in themselves and don't hold up the main narrative for long.

Krishna Deonaraine was born in 1905, the grandson of indentured immigrants from India; he grew up in the sugar village of Palmyra in the south. His father ran a shop in San Fernando which had been established by his paternal grandmother, and the young boy was able to attend Naparima College. But money was tight, and he was forced to leave the school after only three years there. The teenager then went to work with the L.C. Hobson law firm in San Fernando, first as an office boy, then as a clerk.

Young Krishna was remarkably active in the public and political sphere in the 1920s, despite his youth. He became president of the San Fernando branch of Cipriani's Trinidad Workingmen's Association in 1925, at the age of twenty; he was on the executive committee of the East Indian National Association; he founded the Indian National Party around 1928; and he wrote letters to the press. All this got him noticed by the governor, especially when he sent a cable to the USSR congratulating the Russian government and people on the tenth anniversary of the 1917 Revolution.



Samaroo has done well to document the life of this important figure in T&T's history during a crucial period; his book should be widely read and placed in the libraries of the country's secondary schools and universities.

The governor noted his “markedly seditious views” and complained of one or two letters to the press “of a violently anti-British character”. So began decades of close surveillance by local and British security forces. In 1927, Krishna Deonaraine officially changed his name to Adrian Cola Rienzi, adopting the surname of a medieval Italian radical whom he admired. It was undeniably a strange decision, one for which he was publicly attacked decades after his death by the now late Sat Maharaj.

With financial help from his employer, Hobson, Rienzi went to Dublin in 1930, studying for a year at Trinity College there, and then enrolled in the Middle Temple, London, to qualify as a barrister. In both Dublin and London, he got involved in demonstrations and meetings in support of Indian independence, and was influenced by the Indian Communist ex-MP Shapurji Saklatvala. All this ensured that

he was closely surveilled by the British police. When Rienzi returned to Trinidad after being admitted to the English bar in 1934, it was said that the police dossier on him travelled on the same ship that he did. As a result, there was trouble getting him admitted to the local bar because of reports of his “seditious and revolutionary” activities in Dublin and London, and intervention by a high-level British Labour politician was required to ensure his admission.

In the decade between 1934 and 1944, Rienzi was active on many political fronts. Like Cipriani, he operated in three main domains: he was a member of the San Fernando Borough Council and served as Mayor for some years; he was an elected member of the Legislative Council for the county of Victoria between 1938 and 1944; and he was a prominent trade union leader at the very birth of the labour movement here, serving as the first president of the Oilfields Workers' Trade Union and of All Trinidad (sugar workers' union). Samaroo provides detailed accounts of all these activities during this crowded and crucial decade.

Especially valuable, in my view, are the careful and detailed sections on the events of June/July 1937 and the immediate aftermath (pp. 56-70); on the important Arbitration Tribunal in January 1939 which awarded a modest wage increase to oil workers (pp. 81-87); and on the birth of the OWTU and All Trinidad (pp. 92-99). These sections present information on these developments not easily available anywhere else. Chapter 6 analyses Rienzi's work in the Legislative Council, based on the official record (Hansard), and his struggle for universal adult suffrage without any English language test, which would have disenfranchised many older Indo-Trinidadians.

In May 1943, Rienzi was appointed a member of the Executive Council, to the great delight of the Labour movement and the predictable dismay of the business and planter elites. But then, just a few months later, in February 1944, Rienzi resigned from the Executive and Legislative Councils and became a civil servant, accepting a salaried post as Second Crown Counsel. To my surprise, Samaroo offers no explanation for this abrupt and certainly controversial decision. It meant his exit from political and trade union activities for the rest of his life (he retired in 1965 and died in 1972).

Samaroo has done well to document the life of this important figure in T&T's history during a crucial period; his book should be widely read and placed in the libraries of the country's secondary schools and universities.

Bridget Brereton is emerita professor of history at UWI St Augustine.

Life during the pandemic cause you to have another alcoholic beverage or two over your limit? Those extra drinks may lead to more than a pesky hangover, and those effects can be lasting and devastating. Alcohol is one of many coping mechanisms people have adopted because of COVID-19, meaning it's one of the consequences of the pandemic and the way we have been required to live these past years. This is the new normal, dealing with the fallout of massive social trauma, and finding new approaches and opportunities to take us forward.

Dr David R Williams, Professor of African and African American Studies and Sociology at Harvard University spoke on the topic in his feature address at the 4th Biennial Department of Behavioural Sciences Postgraduate Research Conference.

The 4th Biennial DBS Conference, themed “Deconstructing the ‘New Normal’: Prospects and Challenges for Caribbean Societies” and held virtually on April 7-8, 2022, was a discussion that invited perspectives on how the two-year pandemic has changed us forever. It also offered academics an opportunity to interrogate those effects while providing strategic interventions to tackle them effectively. The conference afforded current postgraduate students, researchers, and faculty members the opportunity to collaborate and advance critical discussions on such a pertinent topic.

In deconstructing the “new normal”, the Department of Behavioural Sciences recognised that the pandemic itself has caused our society to be put on pause, and has changed us as individuals and as a society. As individuals, we may now be hyper-focused on levels of cleanliness in a way we weren't before; as a society, there has been an increase in global inequities for many marginalised groups. More so now than ever, the “haves” and “have-nots” are clearly delineated.

As Dr Talia Esnard, Head of the Department of Behavioural Sciences, most eloquently put it in her opening remarks, “We can all understand and appreciate how the pandemic has given us both a curve ball, and it can be seen as a wrecking ball. It also depends on how you look at it and the perspective that you apply, but there is absolutely no doubt that we have all, in one way or the other, been affected by this pandemic.”

In his keynote address, “Improving Health in the Caribbean Region: Challenges and Opportunities”, Dr Williams referenced several studies and data that had some hard truths many of us might wish to ignore. The COVID-19 pandemic has, unfortunately, aggravated the vulnerability of Caribbean citizens to the effects of mental health issues. As a result of this, many vulnerable populations are more likely to experience trauma, whether it be socially, economically, or mentally. What the data also shows is that the pandemic has almost single-handedly aggravated risk factors for non-communicable diseases, such as diabetes, hypertension, and cancer.

The pandemic has seen, to a large extent, increased alcohol consumption worldwide, motivated by the stress of coping with a “once in a lifetime event”.

“But what about that extra drink though?” you might ask. Dr Williams presented research from the UK Independent Scientific Committee (2010 Drugs Ranking) that showed alcohol as the world's most dangerous drug, with heroin in the number two spot. This bit of information is sobering, but there's more. A 2011 WHO report on alcohol revealed that alcohol kills more people than AIDS, tuberculosis, or violence, with 2.5 million people dying each year of alcohol-related causes. You may think that you just ‘take a little thing’ every time you lime, and that only alcoholics are affected adversely, but the same 2011 report stated that even a moderate level of alcohol consumption can increase your risk for 60 different diseases (such as breast cancer), and carries a significant social burden on the population. Our coping mechanisms in the Caribbean tend to often involve alcohol and usually have social components. Due to the pandemic's isolation, quarantine, and social distancing policies, many have begun to imbibe at home in attempts to drown their anxiety, fear, and depression.

As the pandemic has progressed, issues of mental health associated with the lockdown and social restrictions have been exacerbated. Social support has seen decreases as worry and fear for the livelihood of self, family, co-workers, and friends, as well as grief and the loss of loved ones, have

UWI IN SOCIETY

Counting the costs, assessing the opportunities after COVID-19

Harvard's Dr David R Williams focuses on 'the new normal' at the Department of Behavioural Sciences Postgraduate Research Conference

BY OMEGA FRANCIS

all increased. Due to these numerous areas of stress, many have relied on unhealthy behaviours, including increases in alcohol and drug intake, while many reported worsening mental health, undesired weight changes, and disturbed sleep.

Improving health in the Caribbean region does have many opportunities, and Dr Williams was able to reference many. Early intervention programmes for children, upgrading housing conditions, utilising the calming effects of music, re-connecting to a spiritual resource, and even forgiveness are some of the many ways in which health can

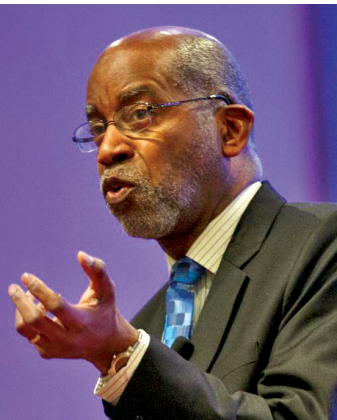
be improved in our region. Dr Williams outlined that the change relies heavily on changing our own perspectives and the stigma of seeking out mental health services. The stigma against mental health treatment must change for us to see progress towards improving the health of our society.

For Dr Williams, one of the many challenges involves our communication, and how the healthcare system can effect change through communication. “What really works best with the public is narrative. To the extent that we can find true stories so that people can understand it, and empathise, and see the real challenge and need. That can have a huge impact on raising awareness levels. Oftentimes in public health, and among healthcare providers, we just assume that people know much more than they do. The challenge of communication and communicating well and raising awareness levels is really a powerfully important one.”

However, there is hope. According to Dr Acolla Lewis-Cameron, Dean of the Faculty of Social Sciences at The UWI St Augustine Campus, “While this period has been one of hardship, both professionally and personally for many of us, it has presented, and continues to offer a rare opportunity to reflect, reimagine and reset our lives, our businesses, our communities, and our countries.”

Omega Francis is a writer, editor and blogger.

The pandemic has seen, to a large extent, increased alcohol consumption worldwide, motivated by the stress of coping with a “once in a lifetime event”



■ BOOK REVIEW

A Book Worthy of Special Notice

Professor Brereton brings a lively take on our past

BY VANEISA BAKSH

A cookbook here, a couple memoirs there; a church, a mandir, a mosque; academics, pioneers, rebels; villains, scoundrels and heroes—don't be misguided by the truthful title of Bridget Brereton's new book, *History Matters*,—the range of subjects is as broad as it is entertaining.

Professor Brereton, the noted Caribbean historian who has retired from The UWI where she held many distinguished posts, including Acting Principal of the St Augustine Campus, has published a collection of her Express newspaper columns from 2011 to 2021. Within those ten years, she had written 248 of them, from which she selected 138 for the compilation, a process she described as “painful,” but necessary as “I didn't want an off-putting tome”.

It might have turned out to be a tome otherwise, but it could never have been off-putting, because Prof Brereton's writing style is engaging and conversational. She maintains academic rigour, but has the rare quality (especially among academics) of being able to create interesting stories about events and people.

The multi-layered title of the book implores readers to accept the importance of history to any civilisation, but is also an indicator of the nature of the content.

She brings her expert historical perspective to the material and, thankfully, has corrected misinformation that often carelessly appears in print and then goes on to be accepted as historical fact. She responds directly to some individual inaccuracies, and to others in a more general manner. For instance, “We sometimes assume that Islam was first brought to Trinidad and the Caribbean by the Indians who began to arrive after the end of slavery. But, in fact, the faith first arrived here much earlier, brought by the enslaved people from those areas of northern West Africa which had been Islamic for centuries. And Trinidad's Mandingo people were Muslims.”

The columns varied in length, based on word counts set by the newspaper, so they are fairly short, but given today's environment, where reading is confined to three-minute forays, this is one of the collection's strengths.

The book has been divided into six sections, all coming under the heading of history. One: Ideas, Debates, Narratives; Two: Anniversaries, Celebrations, Holidays; Three: Approaches, Sources, Heritage; Four: Events and Developments; Five: People; and Six: Books and More Books.

The last is the longest—deservedly so because, over the years, Brereton had been the most consistent voice “noticing” the arrival of new books, and alerting readers to their content and quality.

In the course of reading the columns, it struck me this was an excellent way to broaden the range of information for young people who are growing in an educational environment that sequesters them from real knowledge of the societies they inhabit.

History matters; but not every student and not many adults, have been exposed to the diverse stories that tell about our past in ways that they can relate to. What you learn comes from texts that adhere rigidly to a specific discipline as outlined in a syllabus, no digressions allowed.



Professor Bridget Brereton

In this context, the book should be required reading in schools, from primary level upwards. It is an intelligent way to educate our children about themselves and their Caribbean. What a wonderful chance for them to learn about their heritage, and what an excellent portal for them to enter a world where they can take pride in their people and their place.

In one piece from October 2019, “School histories,” she focused on how the history of our various schools was an important aspect of the overall history of communities and groups. Noting that the older secondary schools had fairly well-documented histories (QRC, St Mary's College and the ‘Convents’), she lamented that this is not the case for others.

“They have a long past, being founded in the 1800s, and their alumni have always included people from influential and prosperous families. But this is not enough.”

She goes on to propose that all schools be so covered, and that the research and writing could be “a project ideally suited to secondary school students (SBAs at CSEC and CAPE), and university undergraduates who undertake research papers as part of their degree studies”.

It is a marvellous suggestion, one which the Ministry of Education should consider implementing.

In fact, as the alarming state of affairs regarding student violence runs parallel with the savagery outside school gates, it is particularly important to address the roots of this national collapse. Many feel alienated from their societies, excluded and disrespected, and lack self-esteem. Adrift without the mooring of feeling connected to this place they cannot call home, they rage against institutions and systems that have failed them. If they were to become involved

in ferreting out the histories of their families, schools, and communities, it might engender a sense of belonging—and you wouldn't want to hurt something you belong to, would you?

What has been evident in the midst of the upheaval wrought by an unprecedented pandemic is that the old ways of doing things have to be recalibrated.

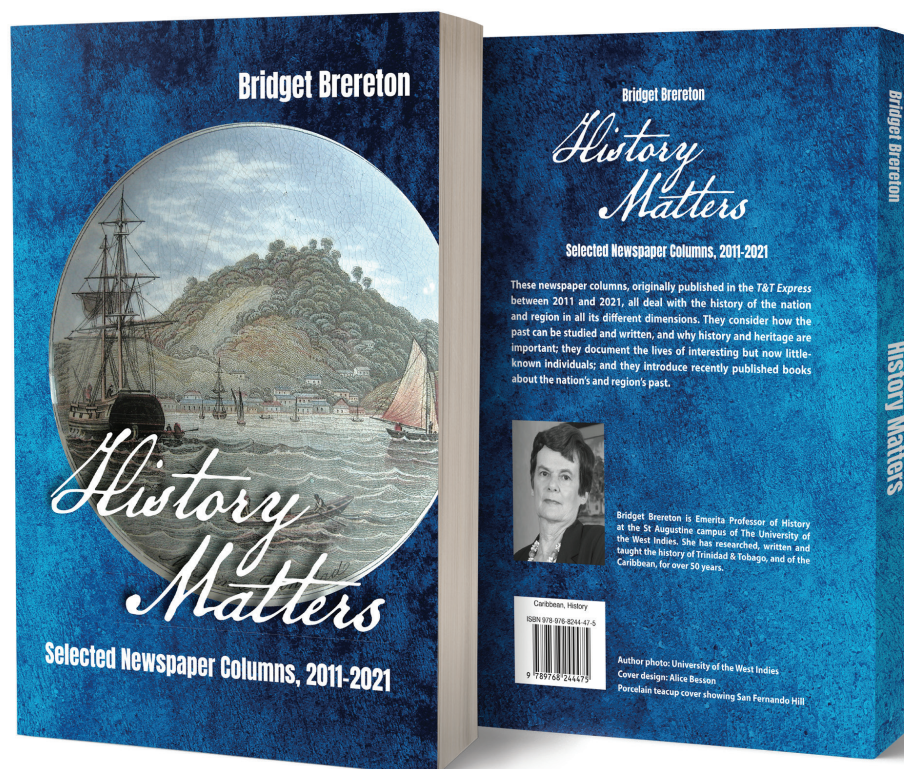
It is not a simple matter of introducing civic studies into curricula—in the old days there were social studies classes at primary school—it requires rethinking the way material is made available to citizens at all levels.

Professor Ken Ramchand has published his collection, *Matters Arising*, 45 pieces from 1987 to 2020, the title coming from his newspaper columns of the time. The late Professor Selwyn Ryan had been one of the most prolific columnists, but while his published works include much material from those writings, there is no book devoted to reproductions of his articles.

Collections like these, compiled from articles that originated in newspaper columns—accessible, interesting, diverse, and topical—have a significant role to play in lifting our collective consciousness

about who we are, where we have been, and what is possible.

Brereton's book is interesting from end to end, but it also fulfills her intent “to contribute to public education on T&T's and the region's past”. It is an invaluable contribution.



The multi-layered title of the book implores readers to accept the importance of history to any civilisation, but is also an indicator of the nature of the content.

■ UWI IN SOCIETY

Energy—the lifeblood of modern, industrialised societies—holds a special place in our economies, ambitions, and imaginations. We furiously debate its impact on the environment. We look with trepidation when its global commodity prices rise or fall. And if energy is one of the most important topics of our age, nuclear energy is the most seductive and terrifying member of its family.

In the case of India, the position of its policymakers and planners is very clear:

“... For the full industrialisation of under-developed countries, for the continuation of our civilisation and its further development, atomic energy is not merely an aid, it is an absolute necessity...”

The quote is from Homi Jehangir Bhabha, a Nobel prize-winning nuclear physicist widely regarded as the father of India's nuclear programme. It was shared by Dr Shirin Haque, Senior Lecturer in Astronomy at UWI St Augustine's Department of Physics at the recent exhibition, “Atomic Energy of India: A Glorious Past, a Resplendent Future”.

The three-month exhibition, which opened in February, looked at the rise of India's atomic energy industry, and showed where the nation intended to take the industry in the coming years.

“Nuclear energy is the fifth-largest source of electricity for India, and is an essential component of its energy security and environmental protection,” said Mr Arun Kumar Sahu, High Commissioner of India to Trinidad and Tobago. “India has over 23 nuclear reactors in seven power plants, producing 6,780 MW of nuclear power while reducing its contribution to global greenhouse gases.”

The High Commissioner added that, “India plans to increase the contribution of atomic energy to 25 percent of the total power capacity in future.”

The exhibition was organised by the High Commission and the Mahatma Gandhi Institute for Cultural Cooperation. It was held at the institute's headquarters in Mt Hope, and gave visitors a glimpse into the power plants (such as Kakrapar in Gujarat and Kudankulam, the largest nuclear power plant in India), products such as radiopharmaceuticals (drugs containing radioactive isotopes), and medical treatments like brachytherapy (radiation therapy).

Apart from the impressive advances India has made in atomic power, the presenters were keen to stress its necessity:

“As we know, due to changes in our living style and [power usage], world energy demand is increasing day by day. To meet this rising energy demand, countries worldwide are exploring various resources, including renewable and non-renewable. Oil and gas, hydro, thermal, solar, wind and nuclear are popular energy choices,” said Dr Davinder Sharma, Head of the Department of Physics at UWI St Augustine, who also spoke at the exhibition.

“In Trinidad and Tobago,” he said, “we have surplus electricity, generated mainly by the natural gas, but countries like India, with a huge population of around 1.38 billion people, where oil and gas is limited, have been exploring many sources like hydro, thermal and nuclear.”

Dr Haque also pointed out Prof Bhabha's analysis of India's limited alternatives to nuclear energy in her presentation. He showed that, at the time, India had 16 percent of the world's population (today it is 17.7 percent), but only about six percent of the world's coal and less than one percent of its oil and gas. However, the country has about 32 percent of the world's thorium reserves. Thorium is a radioactive metal found in nature that can be used in the process to generate nuclear power.

Her presentation, however, did not gloss over the dangers of nuclear power. Titled “Nuclear Energy: A riveting tale of the best and worst of humanity”, she charted the scientific and historical rise of nuclear energy, all the way back to 1905 and Albert Einstein's equation, $E=mc^2$. The equation showed that mass and energy were interchangeable, setting the groundwork for nuclear power. Einstein and his fellow scientists were partly responsible for the development of the atomic bomb by the US because they feared Nazi Germany would develop it first. He would spend the rest of his life warning the world of the dangers of nuclear weapons.

Apart from their use as weapons, there have been nuclear and radiation incidents at power plants such as Three Mile Island in 1979 in the USA, Chernobyl in 1986 in Ukraine, and Fukushima in 2011 in Japan. There is also concern about nuclear waste, a by-product of nuclear power generation, which is both harmful to the natural environment and human life, as well as extremely long-lasting.

Nevertheless, numerous studies have shown that nuclear power is safer for the environment than fossil fuels. One energy sector writer described it as “virtually carbon-free”. In fact, one of the benefits of India expanding its atomic industry is to address the climate crisis. At last year's COP26, Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi pledged that the nation would reach net zero emissions by 2070.

The Nuclear Option

Exhibition shares India's proud atomic energy past, plans for its tomorrow

BY JOEL HENRY



“... For the **full industrialisation** of under-developed countries, for the continuation of our civilisation and its further development, **atomic energy** is not merely an aid, it is an **absolute necessity**...”

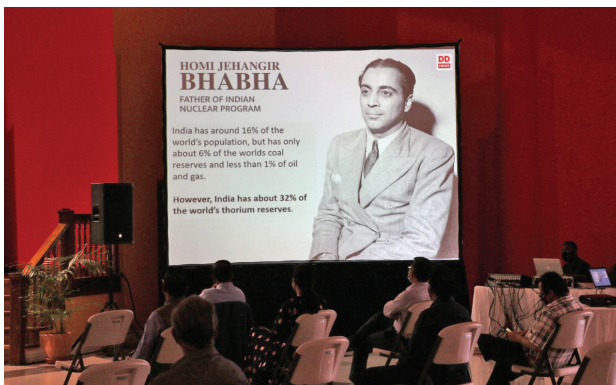
**Homi Jehangir Bhabha, Father of Indian Nuclear Program
Nobel prize-winning Nuclear Physicist**



From left, Director of the Mahatma Gandhi Institute for Cultural Cooperation Mrs Ramya Ajay, Dr Sharma, High Commissioner Sahu, and Dr Haque at the exhibition.



Indian High Commissioner Mr Arun Kumar Sanu telling guests about the Kudankulam Nuclear Power Plant in Tamil Nadu.



Senior Physics Lecturer and UWI Astronomer Dr Shirin Haque gives the feature address.

“In order to fulfil its commitments to the Paris Agreement, India has started exploring solar and wind resources at large scale. Due to the huge population and hence energy demand, India went with the option of power generation, using atomic and nuclear energy,” said Dr Sharma.

Globally, as the climate crisis becomes dire, nuclear power is becoming attractive once more to meet emissions goals. In his presentation, Dr Sharma said that the Department of Physics, “understanding the importance of atomic and nuclear physics” had started a new course on Fundamentals of Atomic and Nuclear Physics. Dr Haque, along with Dr Roger Andrews (lecturer in the Physics Department), proposed and are currently teaching the course.

“At the postgraduate level,” he said, “we also have an advanced course on atomic and nuclear physics, which focuses on its application towards medical/health services.”

If we are in the nuclear renaissance, a time of renewed risk and reward, there is no denying that India is both a pioneer and a leader in its future trajectory. The work of scientists like Professor Bhabha alongside leaders such as Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru have led to the evolution of one of the world's leading atomic energy industries and there is much more to come.

Giving a brief history of Indian thought and science through the ages, High Commissioner Sahu said “carrying this tradition of scientific knowledge, India has approached the nuclear sector for the welfare of the people.”



UWI Calendar of Events | June 2022

UWI St Augustine Postgraduate Experience

June 14

Thinking about taking that next step to postgraduate education? UWI St Augustine is inviting those interested in furthering their careers and academic achievements to a cocktail-style informational event. Meet with the campus deans, deputy deans, the Executive Management team, Graduate Studies staff, members of the Student Guild, researchers and postgraduate students to learn about the educational opportunities at the campus' eight faculties, research, financial assistance, and campus life.

To register, visit: <https://uwi.jotform.com/221433569764968>

Post-pandemic Symposium on Ageing, Resilience and Coping

June 15

ONLINE

This virtual symposium brings together a diverse set of experts in the field of gerontology to discuss the impact of COVID-19 on the ageing population in Trinidad and Tobago. The population of the Caribbean, like much of the rest of the world, is ageing and older adults are contributing their productivity, creativity, and vitality to society. International studies show that COVID-19 has impacted the well-being of ageing populations. However, little research has been conducted on the wellbeing of the elderly in Trinidad and Tobago. The symposium will focus on the challenges they face and their resilience.

To register, visit: <https://bit.ly/DOBUWI>



Business Communication Workshop

June 14 and 15

ONLINE

This interactive two-day workshop is designed to give participants exposure to the fundamentals

of effective verbal and written communication methods and styles for the business environment. The workshop, facilitated by Mrs Wynell Gregorio (Director of Marketing and Communications at UWI St Augustine), will focus on improving written, verbal, and nonverbal skills. Participants will explore communication from writing basics to advanced principles of persuasion, influence, and motivation through writing. This workshop also teaches how to effectively analyse audiences and implement appropriate writing techniques to align styles and approaches to the varying requirements. This workshop is suitable for professionals at all levels and anyone interested in effective communication.

Cost: TT\$1,400/US\$200

10 percent group discount applicable to groups of three or more individuals from the same organisation or The UWI St Augustine campus community. Email sta-fssbdu@sta.uwi.edu or visit <https://sta.uwi.edu/fss/business-development-unit> for registration details.



Industrial Relations Seminar

June 13, 14, 15 and 17

ONLINE

This comprehensive, four-day seminar, facilitated by Rajendra Ramlogan, Professor of Commercial and Environmental Law at UWI St Augustine's Business Development Unit, was designed to help managers, employees, and employee representatives to appreciate the need to properly address post-pandemic challenges and re-engineer methods for fostering positive employee relations while ensuring that effective policies exist to minimise workplace conflict.

Cost: TT\$2,800/US\$400

10 percent discount available to groups of three or more individuals attending from the same organisation and members of The UWI campus community. The seminar is hosted by the Business Development Unit (BDU) of the Faculty of Social Sciences.

For more information, visit the BDU webpage at <https://sta.uwi.edu/fss/business-development-unit> Register at <https://uwi.jotform.com/221083992528866>



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CAMPUS
FACULTY OF
SOCIAL SCIENCES

Business Development Unit

Faculty of Social Sciences

How to Resolve
Employee/Employer Conflict
in a Hyper-Charged
Environment



Date **13, 14, 15 & 17 June, 2022**
Time **5.00 PM - 7.30 PM (EC/AST)**
Venue **Online via Zoom**



Prof. Rajendra Ramlogan
Professor, Commercial and
Environmental Law
Facilitator

Register Now

Email: STA-FSSBDU@sta.uwi.edu

INDUSTRIAL RELATIONS SEMINAR

SAVE THE DATE! JULY 1-3

UWI Open Day Drive Through

Visit The UWI St Augustine website at <https://sta.uwi.edu/> or Facebook page for details.